DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 185 534 CS 005 410

AUTHOR Murphy, Kathleen
TITLE A Survey of Adult Reading Habits.
PUB DATE May 80
NOTE 33p.; M.A. Thesis, Kean College

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC02 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Adults; *Books; *National Surveys; *Newspapers; *Periodicals; *Reading Habits; *Reading Interests; Reading Research; Sex Differences

ABSTRACT

A questionnaire was completed by 110 individuals between the ages of 18 and 65 in a study conducted to determine the primary reason why adults read. The results showed that informational reading was the main purpose for adult reading, but did not indicate a relationship between purpose for reading and socioeconomic status and educational level. The data also indicated that differences existed between the sections of newspapers read frequently by males and females, that differences existed in the types of magazines read by males and females, and that fiction books were the type of books read most frequently. (A copy of the questionnaire and tables of findings are included.) (MKM)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

U S DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH,
EDUCATION & WELFARE
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF
EDUCATION

THIS DOCUMENT HAS BEEN REPRODUCED EXACTLY AS RECEIVED FROM THE PERSON OR ORGANIZATION ORIGINATING IT. POINTS OF VIEW OR OPINIONS STATED DO NOT NECESSARILY REPRESENT OFFICIAL NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION POSITION OR POLICY

ED185534

A SURVEY OF ADULT READING HABITS

by

Kathleen Murphy

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

Kathleen Murphy

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

CS005470

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirement
for the Master of Arts degree in Education at
Kean College of New Jersey
May 1980

This study was conducted to determine the primary reason why adults read. The results showed informational reading as the main purpose for reading. Also, a hypothesis was made that there would be a relationship between purpose for reading and socioeconomic status and educational level. The results of the study indicated that such a relationship did not exist.

The methodology employed in this survey was a questionnaire distributed to individuals between the ages of 18 and 65. The data also indicated other reading habits:

1. Fiction or novels were the types of books read frequently.
2. Sections of the newspapers read frequently by males and females were different.
3. Females read state and local news whereas males read national and international news.
4. There was also a difference between the types of magazines read frequently by males and females.
5. Women and homemaking magazines were read most often by females and news magazines were read frequently by males.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	PAGE
ABSTRACT	iii
LIST OF TABLES	ii
LIST OF FIGURES	i
I. A SURVEY OF ADULT READING HABITS	1
Hypothesis	3
Procedure and Sample	3
Results	12
Conclusions and Implications	18
II. ADULT READING HABITS AND INTERESTS: RELATED RESEARCH	21
III. REFERENCES	26

LIST OF TABLES

TABLE		PAGE
I	AGE AS OF LAST BIRTHDAY	10
II	LEVEL OF EDUCATION COMPLETED	10
III	CURRENT EMPLOYMENT	10
IV	MARITAL STATUS	11
V	PERSONAL INCOME LEVEL	11
VI	MAIN PURPOSE FOR READING	12
VII	TYPES OF BOOKS READ FREQUENTLY	13, 14
VIII	SECTIONS OF THE NEWSPAPER READ FREQUENTLY	14
IX	TYPES OF MAGAZINES READ FREQUENTLY	15

LIST OF FIGURES

FIGURE PAGE

I. Questionnaire 4

As in almost every related reading area, research on the topic of adult reading interests has been conducted. The evidence of these studies is, at times, inconclusive and contradictory; in others the findings are of educational value. For example, Susan E. Holmes (1977) found in her survey of adult reading patterns that there was a difference between the reading purpose of males and females. The male's purpose for reading was recreation, professional development, self education and school related. The female's purpose for reading was recreation, self-education, home related and cultural development.

In determining whether adults read for information, different areas of information reading were examined. The areas of information reading were for educational purposes, self-improvement and for news.

The types of books and magazines adults read were surveyed. Also, the sections of the newspapers that were read most frequently were noted.

Holmes (1977) concluded that the primary purpose for reading was for recreation. An insight into some motivations for reading were discovered as early as the 1950's. Wilbur Schramm (1956) reports that people are motivated to read for a variety of reasons. Some of these reasons are automatic, habitual, down right banal and others are more intellectual, "cultural" and more in harmony with what professionals in

the field consider "higher potentials" of reading. Most readers like to read about things they know about, things they are curious about or things they have dreamed or fantasized about. That is reading interests are based on human interests.

In the survey that I have conducted an examination was made into whether adults today prefer television and movies to books and periodicals. Reasons for a particular preference were noted. One author reports that social contact is achieved more fully through the regular viewing of talk shows than through reading. Anders and Cardell (1977) found in their study of reading habits of adolescents, college students and adults that the general adult population tended to rely on reading materials as their primary source of news as opposed to television or radio. Ernest Larkin(1977) found in his survey of the 21-34 year old market and the daily newspaper that the 21-34 year old age group showed a more favorable attitude toward television than toward newspapers. He also found that adults over the age of 35 were more "newspaper oriented".

The amount of time spent reading a day and what type of reading that is done were surveyed. Some of Richard Murphy's (1973) conclusions in his "Adult Functional Reading Study" were that the average person reads for almost two hours in a typical day and that most of the time is spent reading newspaper, magazines, books and job related matter.

A profile of the respondent by age, sex, marital status, educational level and occupation was included on the questionnaire to see the relationship between these factors and an individual's reading habits. Murphy (1973) reports that an individual's style of life as represented by socioeconomic status is related to his or her reading habits.

Hypothesis

Although Holmes concluded that the primary reason adults read is for recreation, this finding needs to be confirmed with different populations in various areas of the country to provide substantiation. This survey was conducted to determine the main reason why adults read. It was hypothesized that the majority of adults read books and periodicals primarily for entertainment rather than for information, that this purpose is related to socio-economic and educational status, and that adult women read more for recreation than do adult men.

Procedure and Sample

The questionnaire, see Figure 1, was distributed to a sample of one hundred and sixty adults. The sample came from a cross section of employees from different job fields such as; bank employees, clerical workers, teachers, insurance personnel and accountants. One hundred and ten adults completed and returned the questionnaire. The sample as

FIGURE I

1. What is your main purpose for reading? (Check as many that may apply and rank in order of importance with Rank 1, most important, 2 next in importance, etc.)

____ a. self education

____ b. school assignment

____ c. help with profession

____ d. home related

____ e. recreation

____ f. cultural

____ g. current events

____ h. other (specify) _____

2. Remembering the books you have read in the last six months, where did you get the books from?

____ a. bookstore

____ b. library

____ c. loan from a friend

____ d. book club

____ e. own collection

____ f. other (specify) _____

3. How many books have you read in the last six months?

_____

4. Do you read books? Yes____ No____

5. If your answer is Yes, please check how often you may read these types of books.

TYPES OF BOOKS	ALWAYS	USUALLY	SELDOM	NEVER
Bible				
Natural and physical science				
Religion (not the Bible)				
Social Science				
Math				
History and/or geography				
Health				
General reference				
Mystery				
Autobiography/ biography				
Financial				
Fine arts				
Hobbies and/or do it yourself				
Sex and/or marriage				
Adventure				
Literature (classics)				
Romance				
Science fiction				
Short story				

TYPES OF BOOKS	ALWAYS	USUALLY	SELDOM	NEVER
Language				
Philosophy				
Homemaking and/ or cookbooks				
Textbooks				
Business				
Fiction or novel (best seller)				
Other (specify)				

6. Do you read a newspaper? Yes ____ No ____

7. If your answer if Yes, please check how often and what sections of the newspaper you read.

SECTION	ALWAYS	USUALLY	SELDOM	NEVER
National and international news				
State and local news				
Editorial				
Sports				
Comic				
Society				
Financial				
Advertising				
Want Ad				
Other (Specify)				

8. Do you read magazines? Yes ____ No ____

9. If your answer is Yes, please check how often you may read these types of magazines.

TYPES OF MAGAZINES	ALWAYS	USUALLY	SELDOM	NEVER
News				
Women and homemaking				
Sports and recreation				
Media				
Science				
Home and garden				
Auto and mechanics				
Religion				
Trade journals				
Family, marriage, child care				
Fashion				
Finance, business, industry				
Health				
Hobby				
Literary and/or political reviews				
Romance and fiction				
Travel				
Other (specify)				

10. In an average week, how much time do you spend reading? (Please give average hours per day for each category)

_____ a. pleasure

_____ b. work

_____ c. school

_____ d. other (specify)

11. Which of the following leisure time activities do you do most often?

_____ a. listen to the radio

_____ b. watch television

_____ c. read a book

_____ d. go to the movies

_____ e. other (specify)

12. Please give specific reasons why you may participate in one of the above activities more often than another.

_____

_____

_____

13. Are you

Male _____ Female _____

14. Please specify age as of last birthday.

_____	18 to 24	_____	36 to 40
_____	25 to 30	_____	41 to 50
_____	31 to 35	_____	51 to 65
		_____	66 or older

15. Please check the level of formal education you have completed.

_____	None	_____	1 to 3 years of college
_____	Elementary	_____	4 years of college (graduated)
_____	Junior High	_____	Technical School
_____	High school	_____	Graduate school
		_____	Other (specify)

16. Please specify your current employment?

_____

17. Are you

_____	Single	_____	Divorced/separated
_____	Married	_____	Widowed

18. Please check your personal income level.

_____	Under $5,000	_____	$15,001 to $20,000
_____	$5,001 to $10,000	_____	$20,001 to $30,000
_____	$10,001 to $15,000	_____	$30,001 and above

noted in Table I thru V includes 51 males and 59 females.

TABLE I

AGE AS OF LAST BIRTHDAY

Ages	Men		Women	
	No.	%	No.	%
18 - 24	12	24	15	26
25 - 30	24	47	32	54
31 - 35	7	13	6	10
36 - 40	3	6	1	2
41 - 50	3	6	3	5
51 - 65	2	4	2	3
66 or older	0	0	0	0

TABLE II

LEVEL OF EDUCATION COMPLETED

Education completed	Men		Women	
	No.	%	No.	%
High school	6	12	10	17
1 to 3 yrs. college	5	10	10	17
4 yrs. of college	27	53	31	52
Technical school	2	4	1	2
Graduate school	11	21	7	12

TABLE III

CURRENT EMPLOYMENT

Employment status	Men		Women	
	No.	%	No.	%
Unskilled	3	6	1	2
Skilled	7	13	2	3
Clerical	0	0	10	17
Managerial	6	12	5	9
Professional	32	63	34	58
Student	2	4	2	3
Unemployed	1	2	2	3
Homemaker	0	0	3	5

TABLE IV

MARITAL STATUS

Marital status	Men		Women	
	No.	%	No.	%
Single	23	45	29	49
Married	22	43	27	46
Divorced/Separated	6	12	3	5
Widowed	0	0	0	0

TABLE V

PERSONAL INCOME LEVEL

Income	Men		Women	
	No.	%	No.	%
Under $5,000	2	4	8	14
$5,000 to $10,000	4	8	9	15
$10,,001 to $15,000	17	33	26	44
$15,001 to $20,000	13	25	16	27
$20,001 to $30,000	11	22	0	0
$30,001 and above	4	8	0	0

It included adults between the ages of 18 and 65 with the majority between 25 and 30. The educational level of the respondents were from high school thru graduate school and technical school with the greatest number being college graduates. The current employment status of the sample ranged from unemployed to professional jobs with the majority having professional jobs. The marital status of the respondents were single, married and divorced/separated. The number of single adult and married adult respondents were very close. The income level of the sample ranged from less than $5,000 to $30,000 and over. The greatest number of the sample earned between $10,001 and $15,000.

Results

The main purpose of adult reading as shown in table six was found to be primarily for information.

TABLE VI

MAIN PURPOSE FOR READING

Purposes	Men		Women	
	No.	%	No.	%
Self education	15	29	12	20
School assignment	2	4	5	9
Help with profession	9	18	5	9
Home related	1	2	2	3
Recreation	15	29	28	47
Cultural	0	0	0	0
Current Events	9	18	5	9
Other	0	0	2	3

61% of the adults surveyed gave responses that could be broadly subsumed under the category of information. Self education was the type of information reading used by most adults. When distinguishing each area of information reading and reading for recreation, an equal number of males were found to read for self education and for recreation as their main purpose for reading. The main purpose for females was found to be for recreation.

In response to question 3, 96% of the sample indicated that they read books. The mean number of books read by the entire sampling for a six month period, as reported in response to question 3, was 8.2. There was a difference between the mean for males and females. The mean number of books read in a six month period for men was 6.6 and for females 9.6.

The type of books read most often by this sample as indicated in table seven was fiction or novel.

TABLE VII

TYPES OF BOOKS READ FREQUENTLY

Types of books	Men		Women	
	No.	%	No.	%
Bible	1	2	2	3
Natural & physical science	2	4	7	12
Religion (not the Bible)	1	2	1	2
Social Science	10	20	7	12
Math	2	4	4	7
History &/or geography	19	37	13	22
Health	11	22	17	29
General reference	22	43	19	32
Mystery	18	35	24	41
Autobiography/biography	18	35	22	37
Financial	12	24	2	3

TABLE VII (continued)

Types of books	Men		Women	
	No.	%	No.	%
Fine arts	2	4	11	19
Hobbies/Do it yourself	22	43	16	27
Sex &/or marriage	8	16	9	15
Adventure	20	39	28	47
Literature (Classics)	12	24	27	46
Romance	2	4	32	54
Science fiction	15	29	7	12
Short story	14	27	27	46
Language	2	4	4	7
Philosophy	8	16	5	8
Homemaking/cookbooks	2	4	30	51
Textbooks	15	29	20	34
Business	18	35	7	12
Fiction or novel	33	65	50	85
None	4	8	1	2
Other	0	0	1	2

The kinds of books read frequently by males were fiction, hobbies and do it yourself books, general reference books and adventure stories. The type of books read most often by females were fiction, romance, homemaking and/or cookbooks and adventure stories.

Sections of the newspaper read frequently, as noted in table eight, by females were state and local news, national

TABLE VIII
SECTIONS OF THE NEWSPAPER READ FREQUENTLY

Sections of the Newspaper	Men		Women	
	No.	%	No.	%
National & International news	43	84	45	76
State & local news	40	78	49	83
Editorial	27	53	27	46
Sports	36	71	17	29
Comic	25	49	34	58
Society	8	16	28	47
Financial	25	49	4	7
Advertising	16	31	34	58
Want Ad	3	6	21	36
None	1	2	3	5

and international news, comics and advertising. The sections of the newspaper read often by males were national and international news, state and local news, sports and editorials.

TABLE IX

TYPES OF MAGAZINES READ FREQUENTLY

Types of magazines	Men		Women	
	No.	%	No.	%
News	33	65	30	51
Women & Homemaking	2	4	38	64
Sports & Recreation	29	57	11	19
Media	13	25	19	32
Science	8	16	7	12
Home & Garden	4	8	19	32
Auto & Mechanics	6	12	1	2
Religion	1	2	1	2
Trade Journals	11	22	8	14
Family, Marriage, Child Care	2	4	11	19
Fashion	4	8	30	51
Finance, Business, Industry	19	37	3	5
Health	8	16	20	34
Hobby	15	29	12	20
Literary &/or Political Reviews	3	6	12	20
Romance & Fiction	4	8	17	29
Travel	6	12	14	24
None	2	4	1	2

The types of magazines read frequently by females, as noted in table nine, were women and homemaking, news, fashion, health, media and home and garden. The males read frequently in magazines dealing with news, sports and recreation, finance, business, industry and hobby.

In response to question 10, " In an average week, how

much time do you spend reading?", this sample of adults reported they spent an average of two hours a day for pleasure and one and a half hours for work. The books that the respondents utilized were acquired from bookstores, loaned from a friend and the library.

The majority of respondent's leisure time activity sampled in question 11 was reported as watching television. Some of the reasons reported for watching television as asked in question 12 were that "it is relaxing", "you can do other things while watching t.v.", "it's easier", "no effort or concentration is required" and "you can get information faster". The next activity done most often was listening to the radio. Some of the reasons for listening to the radio were the same as watching television: "you can do other things while listening to the radio" and "it is relaxing". The reasons for reading a book were "personal preference", "more to offer", "relaxing" and "you can pick your own time and place for reading".

Of the ten adults who earned less than $5,000, four of them read for self education primarily with two each reading for school assignments, one related and recreation. In the $5,000 to $10,000 income level, four of the respondents read for self education and three each read for help with profession, recreation and current events. Out of forty-three adults earning $10,001 to $15,000 annually, twenty-two read primarily for recreation, eleven for self education,

four each for school assignment and current events and one for help with profession and one job related. Eleven respondents who earn between $15,001 and $20,000 read mainly for recreation. Seven respondents read for self education and seven for help with profession, four for current events and one each for school assignment and job requirement. Of the eleven adults who earned $20,001 to $30,000, four of them read for recreation, two for current events, two for help with profession, one for self education and one is home related. Four of the respondents earned $30,001 and above and each one read, primarily, for a different reason. The reasons were recreation, current events, help with profession and self education.

The highest level of education completed by sixteen of the respondents were high school. The main purpose of reading for six of the adults was self education, four read for recreation, three for current events, two for help with profession and one for home related. Fifteen of the respondents completed one to three years of college. Six of those respondents read primarily for recreation, four for self education, four for school assignments and one read home related materials. Twenty-eight of the respondents who completed four years of college selected recreational reading as their main purpose for reading. Of the other adults surveyed who completed four years of college, eleven read primarily for self education, seven each read for help with profession and current events, two each for school

assignments and for other reasons and one read home related materials. Three of the respondents completed technical school; of the three, two read primarily for current events and one for recreation. Eighteen of the respondents completed graduate school with six of them selecting self education as their main purpose for reading. Help with profession material were read by four respondents and four read primarily for recreation. Two of the adults read for current events, one for home related materials and one for school assignments.

Conclusions & Implications

In a study of this size, it is difficult to extrapolate to the reading habits of the culture as a whole. The results of this survey were very general. The premise made in this study was that the majority of adults read books and periodicals primarily for entertainment rather than for information. The results indicated a rejection of this hypothesis in that the majority read for information rather than entertainment.

Many factors could have contributed to the fact that adults are reading mainly for information. A majority of respondents spent their leisure time watching television or listening to the radio thus supplanting the recreational values of reading. Also, more than half of the sample worked in professional jobs, possibly indicating that for

people to stay in these positions they must read more informational materials.

When comparing the results of Holme's study on main purposes for reading, with the results of this study, many similarities were evident. The main difference, though was with the women respondents. Among the top four categories in Holmes's study for women was that reading was home related and for cultural development. These two areas were not utilized by many of the women in my survey. Rather, school related books and materials that help with professions were read by this sample. The differences could be related to the changes in society in recent years where more women are seen as having entered the work force. Also, the dissimilarity could have been produced by the geographical location of each study.

There did not appear to be a relationship between socioeconomic status with purposes for reading or educational level and purposes for reading. The results as a rule were very similar. Some possible reasons for these results could be that lower educational level individuals and lower socioeconomic level respondents are reading more for information to increase their status and to get ahead and, similarly, use televison for recreation. The middle and higher educational and socieconomic level adults may also be trying to keep up with their positions and further advance themselves.

Further studies should be conducted in this field to

see if the changing sex roles in our culture affects adult reading habits. Another aspect of reading habits to study in the future is whether the trend toward watching television and listening to the radio is seen to be maintained or whether recreational reading increases?

ADULT READING HABITS AND INTERESTS:

RELATED RESEARCH

A popular conception exists that more and more people are reading less and less and that most people do not choose to read when alternatives for sources of information and entertainment are available. Mikulecky reported three surveys in the 1976 NRC Yearbook which certainly bears witness to this. These surveys were: Ross(1955) reported that only 1% of the adult population completes a book during a year, Meade(1973) cited a Harris Poll which indicates that only 26% of all adults read in a book during a 30 day period and the Gallup Poll reported (1969) that 58% of the population indicated they have "never read, never finished" a book.

In Tucson, Arizona, Anders and Cardell(1977) surveyed random samples of junior high school, college and adult population groups for reading habits, self perceived reading abilities and ability to retain information in local newspapers. They found that the general adult population tended to rely on reading materials as their primary source of news as opposed to television or radio to a significantly greater degree than either college or junior high school students. An analysis also showed junior high school students in Tucson read more books but fewer magazines and newspapers than the college and adult population groups. The results of this survey were in striking contrast to popular assumption that more and more people are reading less and less but it may be that junior high school students when they become

adults lose interest or skill and find other sources of information and entertainment easier to utilize.

Anders and Cardell's study only surveyed one city. This one city showed that people there read more than the populations cited by Mikulecky in the 1976 NRC Yearbook.

Larkin(1977) surveyed a random sampling of 500 persons living in the Oklahoma City metropolitan area. Their newspaper reading habits and attitudes toward newspapers were being studied. A profile of that group's attitudes toward news media, particularly newspapers, shows that adults, 21 to 34, are less "newspaper oriented" than adults over the age of 35. The 21 to 34 age group used television primarily for entertainment and newspapers for more specific information. This age group considers television more accurate, informative, ethical, easier to use, more relaxing and more essential than newspapers.

I agree with Larkin's results that deal with the idea 21 to 34 year olds rely more on television than on newspapers. This age group is more television oriented than adults over the age of 35.

Holmes(1977) conducted a survey to determine the reading and library use patterns of adults 18 years of age or older in Orem, Utah. One hundred subjects chosen by random sampling techniques were individually questioned by the researcher. A profile of the respondent was compiled by age, sex, marital status, educational level and occupation. The

reading patterns were determined based on the purpose of reading, sources of reading materials and preferences as indicated by the type of material read. The main purpose of reading for males was found to be for recreation. The next three main reasons were for professional development, self education and school related. For females, the main purpose for reading was recreation. The other major reasons were for self education, home related and cultural development. The sources of reading material were from the bookstore, then the library and a loan from a friend. The types of books read by males were religion, history and biography, fiction, science and business. The types of books read by the females were fiction, religion, homemaking, history and biography and social studies. Holmes(1977) also found that library users tend to read significantly more books than the non-users. She also found that the mean number of books read by her subjects in a six month period of time was 9.9.

I feel the reason that religion books were read very frequently in Holmes' study is because Utah is known as a very religious state. This study being done in another state may not have had religious books as one of the main types of books read by individuals. I would tend to agree with Holmes' findings that state library users read more than non library users.

The purpose of Murphy's (1973) project was to determine "what" adults read, "when", "why" and "how often" they read.

This National survey of reading activities of adults was administered to 5,096 individuals. Some conclusions drawn were: an average person reads for almost two hours in a typical day; most of the time is spent reading newspapers, magazines, books and job related matter; 5% of all adults cannot read in the English language, and an individual's style of life as represented by socioeconomic status, is related to her or his reading habits.

Murphy(1973) found that persons with a high socioeconomic status generally read more than those with a lower status. The findings should not be taken to mean that reading influences socioeconomic status or vice versa. Rather, it leads to the not too startling conclusion that persons in white collar occupations who live in materially and educationally enriched environment spend more time in reading and read a greater variety of items than those in blue collar occupations who are relatively poor and have little formal education.

Murphy's findings seem very logical because many individuals in a high socioeconomic status have many influences urging them to succeed. Today though with so much federal money going into lower socioeconomic areas for educational programs, we should hope that there is an increase in the amount of books read in these areas.

REFERENCES

Anders, Patricia L.; Cardell, Douglas. Self-Perceptions and and Reading Habits of Adolescents, College Students and Adults. Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the National Reading Conference (27th, New Orleans, Louisiana, Dec. 1-3, 1977). Dec. 1977.

Holmes, Susan E. A Aurvey of Adult Reading Patterns in Orem, Utah. A Research paper submitted to the School of Library and Information Sciences, Brigham Young University, Provo, Utah, April 1977.

Larkin, Ernest F. The 21-34 year old market and the Daily Newspaper. ANPA News Research Report No. 1 American Newspaper Publishers Association, Washington, D.C., April 8, 1977.

Murphy, Richard T. Adult Functional Reading Study; Project 1: Targeted Research and Development Reading Program Objective, Sub-Parts 1, 2 and 3, Final Report With Appendixes A, B and C. Educational Testing Service, Princeton, N.J., December 1973.